

IRS Warns of e-Mail Scam about Tax Refunds

IR-2005-136, Nov. 30, 2005

WASHINGTON — The Internal Revenue Service today issued a consumer alert about an Internet scam in which consumers receive an e-mail informing them of a tax refund. The e-mail, which claims to be from the IRS, directs the consumer to a link that requests personal information, such as Social Security number and credit card information.

This scheme is an attempt to trick the e-mail recipients into disclosing their personal and financial data. The practice is called “phishing” for information.

The information fraudulently obtained is then used to steal the taxpayer’s identity and financial assets. Generally, identity thieves use someone’s personal data to steal his or her financial accounts, run up charges on the victim’s existing credit cards, apply for new loans, credit cards, services or benefits in the victim’s name and even file fraudulent tax returns.

The bogus e-mail, which claims to come from “tax.refunds@irs.gov,” tells the recipient that he or she is eligible to receive a tax refund for a given amount. It then says that, to access a form for the tax refund, the recipient must use a link contained in the e-mail. The link then asks for the personal and financial information.

The IRS does not ask for personal identifying or financial information via unsolicited e-mail. Additionally, taxpayers do not have to complete a special form to obtain a refund.

If you receive an unsolicited e-mail purporting to be from the IRS, take the following steps:

- Do not open any attachments to the e-mail, in case they contain malicious code that will infect your computer.
- Contact the IRS at 1-800-829-1040 to determine whether the IRS is trying to contact you about a tax refund.

The IRS has seen numerous attempts over the years to defraud the public and the federal government through a variety of schemes, including abusive tax avoidance transactions, identity theft, claims for slavery reparations, frivolous arguments and more. More information on these schemes may be found on the criminal enforcement page at IRS.gov.